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ABSTRACT

Individuals or groups interested in conducting follow-up studies of former students should find this document helpful. A follow-up study is a procedure for accumulating pertinent data from or about individuals after they have had similar or comparable experience. Generally the follow-up study should obtain information which assists in determining the extent to which objectives of the system have been met. Determining the procedure and the groups to be used is discussed. Also, instrumentation, locating respondents, and organizing for the study are areas of concern. (GEB)

Developing & Conducting Follow-up Studies of Former Students

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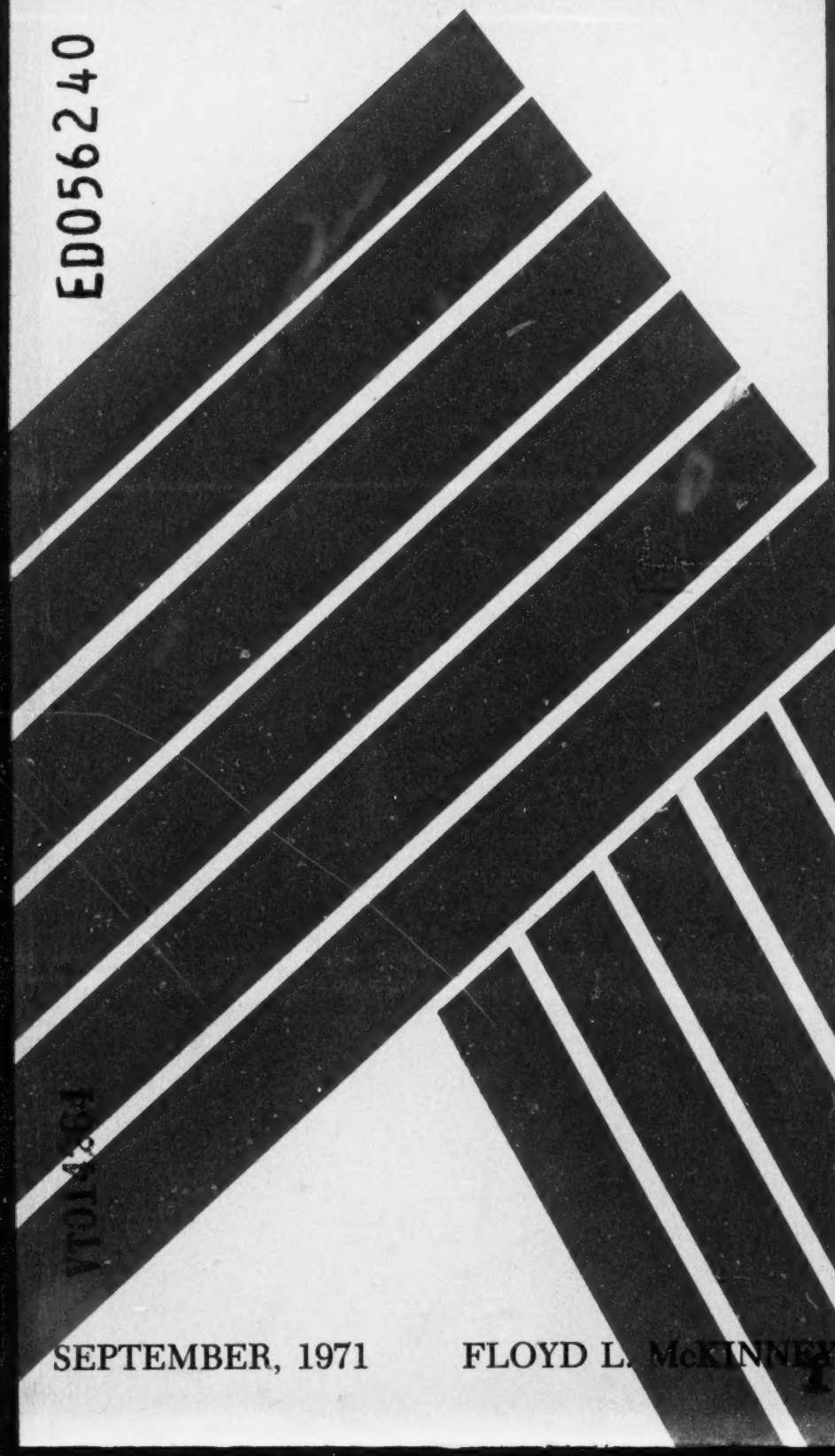

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SEPTEMBER, 1971 FLOYD L. McKINNEY CHARLES OGLESBY

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DEVELOPING AND CONDUCTING FOLLOW-UP STUDIES OF FORMER STUDENTS

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PREFACE

This publication was prepared to assist those individuals and groups interested in conducting follow-up studies of former students. Like many other fields, the procedures and techniques considered successful in conducting follow-up studies today may likely be educational historical relics tomorrow. We encourage you to keep abreast of the latest successful follow-up procedures.

Many of the practices recommended in this publication have been found successful by many researchers. Our own experience in using the recommended procedures largely relates to our direction of the Central Kentucky Vocational Education Evaluation Project.

Floyd L. McKinney

Charles Oglesby

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DEVELOPING AND CONDUCTING FOLLOW-UP STUDIES OF FORMER STUDENTS

The focus of most evaluation efforts should be on the product or the outcomes of the educational system. This emphasis on the output of the educational system means that we need to look at the former students of that system to assist in determining the effects of the educational system on the former students. One of the ways of securing information about former students is to conduct a follow-up study of the former students.

WHAT IS A FOLLOW-UP STUDY?

A follow-up study is a procedure for accumulating pertinent data from or about individuals after they have had similar or comparable experiences. It is important to remember that follow-up implies the collection of data about something which has already taken place. In other words students are asked to reflect back on how the program in question either prepared him or failed to prepare him for his future work. It should be remembered that follow-up studies are not the complete answer for evaluating educational systems. They are but one important component of a larger design for evaluating the educational endeavor.

WHY CONDUCT A FOLLOW-UP STUDY?

The decision whether or not to conduct a follow-up study must evolve from the objectives of the total evaluation effort. Once these objectives have been determined, one can then proceed to identify the kinds of information needed to answer the questions raised by the educational program objectives. Several techniques and procedures may be necessary to get the needed information. A former student follow-up study may be one of the selected procedures for information gathering.

PURPOSES OF THE FOLLOW-UP STUDY

Generally the follow-up study should obtain information which assists in determining the extent to which the objectives of the educational system are being met. There are other "side effects" and these are discussed later in the paper.

In most cases the follow-up study will be in the nature of a self-survey. As such the follow-up study may produce benefits beyond that of data collection and analysis. It can act as a motivating force for change.

The follow-up study is more closely concerned with the "community within a community" - that of the educational system. The school system includes teachers, school administrators, students, parents, the board of education and (hopefully) vocational education citizen advisory committees, all of whom have a vested interest in the outcomes of the educational system. Since so many groups and individuals are involved, the follow-up study has the potential for uncovering conflicts which may be existent in the overall educational community. In some cases a follow-up study (or most precedures or techniques used in evaluation) may be seen as a threat to individuals or to particular programs. At the very least, a follow-up study will probably indicate areas requiring change of some sort - addition of new programs, deletion of others or revision of existing programs. Groups or individuals closely associated with programs which are identified as those requiring change will naturally be most affected by the results of the follow-up. It is, therefore, exceedingly important that <u>all</u> interested parties be actively involved in the follow-up study.

Wormser and Selltiz note the importance of bringing about change by involving the community in a self-survey. Their following comments are applicable to follow-up studies.

> The belief that a community self-survey can lead to change in the community is based on the following assumptions: (A) Individuals who participate in an undertaking tend to become ego-involved in it. In a fact-finding project, such ego-involvement is likely to take the form of a sense of personal responsibility to do something about the situation which one has helped to discover . . . if those situations do not conform to general standards of equitable social relationships. (B) Group membership (and respondents <u>are</u> members of the group) reinforces individual commitment and provides support for individual behavior, with the result that people who may lack courage or skill to work by themselves toward changes which they believe to be desirable are able to undertake constructive action as members of a group. Through its use of working committees and other operating groups, the self-survey brings to bear these group membership effects. (C) In any self-survey focused on problems over which these are misunderstandings or apparent conflicts of interest between sub-groups in the community, the experience of members of these various subgroups in working together on a study of the common problems may in itself help to change attitudes which have contributed to the problem.[1]

In regard to the whole population of former students, follow-up serves a very useful purpose in eliciting evaluative responses from former students reflecting the success of the vocational education program in preparing them for employment. Important information is found in answer to such questions as:

1. What training received was important to them?
2. What training was unimportant?
3. What suggestions for improving the job preparation programs do they have?

This kind of information is of an advisory nature and has some limitations because respondents generally have a limited knowledge of alternatives, and each respondent reacts out of a different frame of references.

A common purpose for which follow-up studies have been used is to make program comparisons. Comparisons have been made of vocationally trained graduates versus non-vocationally trained graduates on measures of job satisfaction, earning, and job stability. There is great danger of gross error in such

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[1]Margot Haas Wormser and Claire Selltiz, "Community Self-Surveys: Principles and Procedures," <u>Research Methods in Social Relations</u> (New York: The Dryden Press, 1957), p. 611.

comparisons because of differing objectives for different programs and the characteristics of the students in the program.

Some of the specific uses for a follow-up study include:

1. Emphasizing the primary objectives of vocational education,
2. Showing evidence of services provided by the vocational education program,
3. Showing effectiveness of vocational education programs,
4. Determining evidence of placement and need for training,
5. Revealing a need to bring about an improvement in the placement of graduates,
6. Assisting in upgrading the public image of vocational education,
7. Publicizing purposes at the state and/or local level,
8. Securing information for state-wide meetings of local directors and supervisors to focus attention on:
   a. Employment and placement trends,
   b. Reasons for good or poor placement,
   c. Programs with marginal value, and
   d. Causes for lack of completion of training,
9. Determining the need for establishment, consolidation and/or limitation of training opportunities in certain program areas, and
10. Providing information helpful in identifying strengths and weaknesses in local programs.

INVOLVING SIGNIFICANT GROUPS IN FOLLOW-UP STUDIES

The Counseling Service

The counseling service in the school system should be the agency most interested in the results of an evaluation effort. For the student, counseling is the primary area in which community employment needs and the aptitudes and

personal desires of the individual come together. The counseling service can help in matching student desires and aptitudes with available jobs in the community or can point the way to desired training and occupation outside the immediate community.

The student needs to know how he stands in relation to employment opportunities. If the student, for various reasons, must remain in the immediate area in his pursuit of a career, he is entitled to know what jobs are available (or will be available in the future) and the training he will need to secure a job. He is also entitled to know how well the educational system will prepare him for a job.

If the student's personality, characteristics and aptitudes do not coincide with the educational and occupational environments of the local community (and he has the means to relocate), he is entitled to counseling which will point him in the desired direction.

The results of a carefully planned and executed follow-up in conjunction with other aspects of evaluation will provide background information for productive vocational counseling. The follow-up study provides information of most immediate concern to the student since it is derived from those former students who have already completed studies in a curriculum in which he is involved or interested.

The school counselor should be included in all phases of evaluation -- planning, executing, analyzing, and translating results into program modifications. The counselor, perhaps more than anyone else in the school system, should be aware of the personality traits, basic aptitudes, desires for the future, and academic potential of the student body. The school counselor is the logical person to participate in the formulation of objectives for a follow-up survey. He is also vital to the selection of groups to be surveyed, the type of data to be obtained, and most certainly in the construction of questionnaires to be

administered. In addition to the personal characteristics of former students the counselor should be cognizant of the socio-cultural patterns prevailing in the community. He will be able to advise concerning the best potential approach to former students in the selection of questionnaire format and wording of cover letters to insure that the content is pitched neither too high nor too low for the intellectual capabilities of the respondents.

When the former student questionnaires have been returned, the counselor can be very helpful in the analysis and presentation of data. He will need to bring into play all his tact and experience in the presentation of data to preclude misunderstandings. Follow-up studies are designed to help both students and educators and not to provide ammunition for departmental warfare.

The follow-up study will do more than provide data directly for individual and group counseling. In conjunction with data from other evaluation activities, results from the follow-up can be very useful in curriculum modification or development. The counselor should be included in these endeavors because he is, after all, responsible to teachers as well as students for help in designing courses for the student population.

It may seem to the reader that a disproportionate amount of emphasis has been placed on the role of the counselor in follow-up studies. In truth, it is the opinion of the writers that follow-up is primarily a function of the counseling service. There is no intention, however, to negate the role of other concerned groups or individuals. As previously stated, there are others who should be involved in the planning, preparation, and conduct of follow-up studies.

The Teacher

In any school the teacher has the most daily contact with the student. He will have a "feel" for general attitudes in the classroom and may be able to point to curriculum areas which seem to be successful or unsuccessful from the point of view of the student. The teacher will most likely have the confidence

of most students and will receive feed-back from former students and students currently enrolled. Since certain portions of follow-up require classroom time (orientation of students regarding the importance of follow-up prior to leaving school) it is, at the very least, a matter of courtesy to include the teacher in planning and conducting a follow-up. Because of the teacher's position, he is perhaps the most important person in developing a positive attitude toward evaluation in regard to students and parents. The teacher can literally make or break the evaluation effort

The School Administration

The school administrator is no less important to an evaluation effort than the teacher. In most cases the school principal can decide whether or not his school will conduct a follow-up study. The principal has an important role in developing a positive attitude toward the follow-up study within the faculty. He has the prerogative of scheduling time to be spent on evaluation projects. He can also allot office time and personnel to be utilized. The school administrator is vital in maintaining liaison between the school and the Board of Education and between the school and the State Education Agency. Seldom will an evaluation activity of any kind succeed without strong administrative commitment to the effort.

The Student Committee

It is a growing trend, and a most rewarding one, to include students in the formation of objectives and plans. The student committee can be helpful in pinpointing curriculum areas in need of review. The student committee should certainly be included in the selection or construction of follow-up instruments so that they will be relevant to students. Students currently enrolled can help locate friends who are former students. In some follow-up studies members of the student committee have aided project directors in administering questionnaires to special education students and have been involved in mailing

procedures, compiling data, analyzing data and formulating recommendations. The mere fact that students are included in meaningful aspects of the follow-up should go far in "selling" the study to the student body. A positive attitude on the part of students is necessary to insure that valid data will be obtained.[2]

The Board of Education and the Vocational Education Citizens' Advisory Committee

It is of great importance to involve citizens in an active capacity in the follow-up study. It is fully recognized that the advisory committee does not have the legal function of the board of education. However, the fact that both organizations are composed of members of the community is most important to the success of the follow-up. The members of these groups will be able to obtain feed-back from the community regarding the preparation of students for employment. They will, in many cases, be the employers of graduates from the school system. In addition, individual members can survey other employers in the same (or different) fields of business. Citizens committees should be included in the construction of questionnaires to be submitted to employers - those questionnaires which are designed to elicit information concerning the quality of student preparation for employment. The Board of Education should make the final decision regarding the participation in a study of the local educational system.

This is certainly not an exhaustive listing of groups to be included in a follow-up study or the functions of these groups. Each school system is unique and the sources of aid and information within the community will be determined by the overall objectives of the school system and the objectives of the follow-up study.

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[2]For further information regarding the use of student committees in evaluating educational programs see the Final Report of the Central Kentucky Vocational Education Project. Lexington: KRCU, College of Education, University of Kentucky, 1971.

DETERMINING THE FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURE

The mail follow-up is most frequently used. The problem of nonrespondents is a major shortcoming of the mail follow-up procedure. In a Wisconsin study with a 46.9 percent response, it was discovered that 78 percent of the former students in the top percentile of their class returned the questionnaire, while only 23 percent from the bottom percentile returned questionnaires. In a study in Arkansas, five rural schools conducting mail surveys did not receive any completed questionnaires from former students who had left school prior to graduation. If our evaluation effort is to be successful we will have to obtain feedback from all whom our programs are designed to serve and not just our successful graduates. Therefore, again it must be emphasized that the respondents must be made to feel that they are valuable members of the "group."

One approach to follow-up which has proven successful is the interview technique, either in person or by phone. Personal interviews are probably the most desirable kind of follow-up because they provide the opportunity to ask questions of clarification which may provide deeper insight into the problems of occupational preparation as percieved by the former students. Personal interviews can be very expensive and require a great amount of staff time. The telephone interview can be effectively used on a sampling basis. One is limited on the amount of information which can be obtained, but the telephone interview may be the only workable procedure for some segments of the population.

The following factors should be considered in determining the best follow-up procedure to use:

1. What kind of data are needed?
2. How much data are to be obtained?
3. What are the sources of data?
4. How much time is available?

5. What is the size of the group or groups to be studied?

6. How much money is available?

7. What is the availability and competency of the staff?

Schools planning their first occupational follow-up study should seek the assistance of a consultant. Small scale studies done frequently are often more helpful than studies of larger scope done with long lapses of time between them.

DETERMINING THE GROUPS TO FOLLOW-UP

There must be an accurate and complete definition of the group or groups to be studied. If the wrong people supply the data, the results will not be valid. Surveys may be organized to cover a single occupation, several occupations in a single field, or to cover all the fields in which the school offers occupational studies. In the past most follow-up studies have been made of a single occupation or occupational field. However, in order to achieve a picture of the entire system all former students, general curriculum as well as vocational education students, should be included in follow-up studies.

If the picture of the total educational effort is to be realistic the follow-up study must include students who did not graduate as well as those who did graduate. In some schools the dropouts comprise a rather sizeable proportion of the classes, which, if ignored, could result in providing misleading findings. In examining the procedures for conducting the follow-up study (discussed later in this paper), keep the dropout in mind. Perhaps a different approach should be made to the dropout - a different form of letter and questionnaire or even a different type of survey, such as the interview. It is of great importance to make the dropout feel that he is a vital part of the follow-up population.

Only those out of school for a year or more should be included in a follow-up study. Former students being followed-up should have been out of

school a sufficient length of time to be able to reflect on the relevance and helpfulness of their previous educational experience. A problem very difficult to cope with centers around the fact that the longer former students have been out of school the greater the problem of separating the value of the educational experience from the influence of noneducational activities. Also, the longer they are away from school the less valid their judgments about the current educational program are likely to be. Schools have most often followed-up classes that have been out from one to two years or those out three to six years.

Another very valuable kind of follow-up is the trend study. This would involve a school making a study of at least two classes of former students at the same time.

Should you study all former students of a class or sample the population? Many schools have studied an entire class. However, sampling techniques, when properly applied, will provide reliable and valid results.

DEVELOPING THE FOLLOW-UP INSTRUMENT

A major concern in doing follow-up studies is the development of the instrument. Developing a good follow-up instrument can be a very difficult and time-consuming task.

Since the follow-up instrument will probably be one of the primary sources of data used in determining if the educational system is fulfilling its objectives, it logically follows that the instrument items should be designed to gather information which will help to determine if the educational system is successful or should improve its programs. If our program objectives are stated in performance terms, the magnitude of our task is somewhat reduced. The program objectives become the basis for stating the criterion questions and, consequently, the follow-up instrument questions.

A criterion question is merely one which states the objective in such a

way that an answer is called for which will help measure the attainment of that objective. Some program objectives will require stating more than one criterion question, while in other cases it may even be possible to develop instrument items without going through the intermediate step of stating a criterion question. Following the statement of criterion questions, the next step is to develop or select as many instrument items as will be needed to obtain sufficient information for answering the criterion question. An example of this process follows:

PROGRAM OBJECTIVE: To provide students an educational program which will result in a career that is satisfactory to the former student.

CRITERION QUESTION

To what extent did former students receive an adequate vocational education during their high school years?

ITEMS FOR THE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Considering all of your occupational experiences since leaving school, how well do you feel your school prepared you?

Well prepared 1.1___

Satisfactorily prepared 1.2___

Inadequately prepared 1.3___

Please rate your former school frankly on the items listed below.

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
1. Quality of vocational instruction	___	___	___	___
2. Quality of academic instruction	___	___	___	___
3. Physical condition of school.	___	___	___	___
4. Teacher interest in students.	___	___	___	___
5. Instructional materials and aids.	___	___	___	___
6. Student counseling	___	___	___	___
7. Preparation for job interview	___	___	___	___
8. Job placement of students	___	___	___	___
9. Practical application of training to job.	___	___	___	___
10. Reputation in community	___	___	___	___

1. To what extent did the school prepare you to work with your supervisors and fellow workers?

Excellent preparation 12.1____

Adequate preparation 12.2____

Some preparation 12.3____

No preparation 12.4____

Generally open-ended items should not be used. The responses to such questions are so varied that they are almost impossible to categorize and summarize. However, a forced choice question can provide misleading data if it does not provide for all the alternative answers or space for the respondent to write in an answer.

Serious questions should be raised when asking questions about demographic data. Usually information relating to the former students age, sex and address is in the school files. It needlessly increases the length of the questionnaire thereby increasing the length of time needed to complete it if you ask for information you already have.

Let us consider some of the problems associated with frequently sought information about present jobs held, job history, income and evaluation type items.

We are naturally interested in the present job held by the former student. That appears simple enough, but several knotty problems are associated with such an item. In response to the question, "What is your job?" varied answers are usually given. These unidentifiable responses may be reduced by asking for a job title with some examples and may be followed with a question, "What do you do on this job?" Even this presents two difficulties -- the nature of the job description of different employers and the nature of the response.

If a job history is to be obtained a check should be made of the reported time elements. Does the amount of reported time total to the elapsed time? Girls frequently report "housewife" and "job" as coterminous full-time

occupations. Part-time employment may overlap full-time employment. Unemployment is difficult to differentiate from "not interested in a job."

Another problem involves the matter of income. Should it be obtained as hourly, weekly, monthly or yearly income? There is a natural reluctance on the part of many respondents to report income, but is not so great that a high percentage fail to respond. If you are concerned that it will antagonize someone, making the question optional seems to be a good strategy. Another approach is to place it last on the form. A respondent who has completed most of the form is less likely to quit at the last minute over such an item.

Evaluation type questions are probably best done with some index scale. A variety of conditions can influence responses, such as: the way the question is asked -- "How well did you <u>like</u> your vocational program?" is a positively directed statement. "How did you <u>feel</u> about your vocational program?" is a less positively directed statement.

INSTRUMENT FORMAT

The follow-up instrument should be drafted into precise format and space. The items should be organized by sections such as job related, educational, avocational, military service, self assessment, and educational system. The instrument items should be reviewed for comment by other persons who are competent in the areas for which the data is required.

The instrument should be designed for either keypunching, optical scanning or mark sensing. Be sure to check with the technologist where your instrument will be processed to determine the requirements for instrument design.

Appropriate length of the instrument is an uncertain issue. However, it is generally conceded that the size of the instrument (number of items and the physical bulk) is inversely related to response rate. It is also related to costs, through increased printing, mailing and processing.

The mechanical presentation of the instrument is very important. You can almost guarantee poor response if it is mimeographed on white paper. Remember that the instrument will most likely be arriving in the mail with various advertisements which have all the expertise of Madison Avenue behind them. Witness the colorfully lithographed "opportunities" for books, cameras, radios, building lots in Florida, and magazines at cut-rate prices (complete with certificates and coupons edged in gold). You will certainly not be able to compete with such high-pressure salesmanship, but you can make definite efforts to prevent the follow-up instrument from being discarded along with the junk mail. Some suggestions:

1. Colored paper tends to result in a higher return.
2. If the instrument is printed in booklet form, make sure the pages are numbered in sequence (and don't stick together).
3. Make sure the printing is legible.
4. Design the questionnaire in a size convenient for mailing.
5. Almost anything you can do to make your approach "different" will enhance the possibility of receiving a response.

In other words do a professional job of styling and be sure it looks like a serious instrument with good face validity.

PILOT APPLICATION OF THE INSTRUMENT

The best way to determine if the questionnaire directions and questions are clearly stated is to pre-test them to see if they can be understood and answered. Under the press of time this step is frequently overlooked or given only minor attention. Time given to pretesting can save hours of labor in summarizing and significantly improve the response rate, reduce missing data and increase the reliability of the instrument. The instrument should be pretested with in-school students as well as former students. Ask them to participate in the decisions concerning type of data to be collected (which includes objectives

of the follow-up survey), type of questions to be asked, wording of the questions, and designing the instrument (including physical appearance of the instrument.)

PROCEDURES FOR CONDUCTING THE FOLLOW-UP

A technique gaining in popularity is to send a card or letter to the former student prior to mailing the follow-up instrument. The purpose of this card or letter is to alert the former student that he will soon be receiving an important instrument, which he is urged to complete and return as soon as possible.

The following mailing pattern is suggested at one week intervals.

First mailing - "Alert" card

Second mailing - follow-up instrument, cover letter, and return envelope -- stamped and addressed.

Third mailing - first thank-you reminder card.

Fourth mailing - second request follow-up instrument, second cover letter, and return envelope -- stamped and addressed.

Fifth mailing - second thank you-reminder card.

The cover letter should be brief, but indicate the purpose of the study, uses to be made of the findings, the importance of hearing from everyone in the class, a suggested date by which the form should be returned, and assurance of the confidentiality of the information to be provided. An effort should be made to make the respondent feel that he is a part of the study.

If at all possible, the cover letter should be signed by a person whom the former student will recognize and trust. This may be a school administrator, counselor, or a key faculty member who has worked closely with students and is more likely to elicit responses from them. Who can resist a letter that has been personally addressed and signed as opposed to a greeting from a computer?

Examples of the types of letter and cards to be sent are included on the following pages.

SAMPLE

(School Letterhead)

First Mailing -- "Alert" Card

Date

Mr. John Doe
1414 Bluebird Avenue
Anytown, Kentucky 10101

Dear John:

In the near future you will receive a questionnaire concerning your employment experiences since leaving our school. I should like to request your cooperation by completing and returning the questionnaire. It is designed to aid in improving our programs for preparing students for the world of work. Your responses to the questions will be of tremendous aid to us and the students now preparing for employment. Your answers will be kept in strictest confidence.

Sincerely,

Superintendent of Schools or Teacher

SAMPLE

Second Mailing -- Cover Letter

(School Letterhead)

Date

Mr. John Doe
1414 Bluebird Avenue
Anytown, Kentucky 10101

Dear John:

We are pleased to have an opportunity to contact you regarding your employment since leaving our school. We are cooperating with all of the other schools in this area and the Kentucky Bureau of Vocational Education to study the needs for vocational and technical education.

Your responses on the enclosed questionnaire will help school staff members make a realistic review of what former students are now doing and what kinds of training programs might be desired. It is not necessary for you to sign your name to the questionnaire since it has been pre-coded for objectivity during analysis.

Please use the enclosed envelope to return the questionnaire by (Date) _____. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Superintendent of Schools or Teacher

SAMPLE

Third Mailing — First Thank You-Reminder Card

Date

We want to express our thanks for your cooperation in completing the questionnaire recently sent to you. We hope to have some summaries made early in (Month).

Sincerely,

Superintendent of Schools or Teacher

P.S. If you have not yet completed the questionnaire, please complete it and put it in the mail today. Thanks.

SAMPLE

Fourth Mailing — Second Request Cover Letter

(School Letterhead)

Date

Mr. John Doe
1414 Bluebird Avenue
Anytown, Kentucky 10101

Dear John:

The response to our request for information from members of the 1963 class has been most gratifying. The return questionnaires are being analyzed by school staff members and we hope to present a preliminary report within the next three weeks.

Perhaps the first questionnaire we sent to you has been mislaid so we have enclosed another for your convenience. We hope to have all of our former students respond so that the information will be as complete as possible.

Please use the enclosed envelope to return the completed questionnaire today. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Superintendent of Schools

SAMPLE

Fifth Mailing -- Second Thank You-Reminder Card

Date

Your cooperation in returning the former student follow-up questionnaire is appreciated. The completed questionnaires have provided the school staff with much valuable information for developing a plan to meet the vocational and technical education needs of youth in our area.

Sincerely,

Superintendent of Schools

P.S. Perhaps your questionnaire is one of the few still not received. We hope it is now in the mail. Thanks.

A stamped, self-addressed envelope should always accompany the follow-up instrument and cover letter.

Timing is as important in a follow-up study as it is to an announcement for political office or a fund-raising drive. There is a slight perference for the early part of the week; mailings should be timed so that items arrive on Monday or Tuesday. Avoid periods of "stress" such as the middle of April (income tax time), vacation time, holidays, etc. When using a multiple mailing approach it makes sense to use a different strategy on the second and third mailings. Some people are early-in-the-week performers, others late-in-the-week performers. If you tried to reach them early in the week on the first mailings, try for a week-end arrival on a subsequent mailing so the letter arrives on Friday or Saturday. Urge respondents to "do it now." The longer an instrument is kept, the less likely it will be completed and returned. Remind them of the date by which the instrument should be returned.

Again, perhaps the greatest emphasis should be placed on those former students who did not complete the program. Members of a conference on follow-up studies in education research had this to say:

> All agreed that those who require the most prodding before they will respond are generally those the programs are trying harder to help.[3]

Cover letters should have letterheads and envelopes should have return addresses with which the former students can easily identify. The physical appearance of the materials sent to former students should be professional in layout and designed to arouse interest.

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[3]Judith S. Craig, Proceedings of the Conference on Follow-up Studies in Educational Research (Madison: Center for Studies in Vocational and Technical Education, Industrial Research Institute, The University of Wisconsin, 1965), p. 31.

LOCATING RESPONDENTS

One of the most difficult problems in a follow-up study can be locating respondents. One of the best methods of maximizing returns is the advance orientation of students who are to respond to instruments at a later date. Before students leave your vocational education program it is a good idea to acquaint them with the fact that they will receive a follow-up instrument through the mail. Discuss with the students why this is being done. If at all possible expose them to the follow-up instrument so they can raise any questions they may have. From the experiences of other researchers we know this procedure will greatly improve your rate of returns. If soneone who knows the students explains what is coming and why it is beind done they are more likely to respond.

During advance orientation it might be well to provide students with "We have moved" cards, pre-addressed to the former student's instructor or school. Always have students list their parents addresses as contact for forwarding addresses.

There is one serious danger with advance orientation. Teachers may have the opportunity to introduce bias in the results by influencing student answers. However, the increased rate of returns greatly offsets this disadvantage.

Following graduation there are other methods which can be used to ferret out the department former student. Some of these methods include:

1. Writing "Please Forward" on announcements and survey instruments,
2. Sending self-addressed change-of-address cards to parents of non-respondents so the parents can provide the current address, and
3. Obtaining cooperation from local news media (newspapers, radios, and TV) for public service announcements concerning the follow-up survey.

Schwarzweller, in a study of former students in Eastern Kentucky, sent teams of "detectives" to locate former students. Field workers drove from community to community interviewing school superintendents, teachers, parents,

relatives, neighbors, friends, post office clerks, store owners, and schoolmates.[4]

Another method of locating people is the local credit bureau. They certainly know how to keep up with people, however this is an expensive process.

ORGANIZING FOR THE STUDY

Finally, make it easier on yourself and other staff members by organizing your project so that you can tell on any one moment how the study is progressing. A helpful procedure is to make charts to include orientation procedures, conferences, mailing dates and dates for completion of various phases of the study. It may be more convenient to break the project into phases which can be completed within themselves without doing harm to the overall project. In planning the follow-up study it is well to draw up a schedule of activities. Following is an example of typical activities.

SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES

Phase I

Preparation

1. Develop objectives for the follow-up study.
2. Determine the group or groups of former students to be involved in the follow-up study.
3. Determine best method of conducting the follow-up study:
    a. Mailed questionnaire
    b. Personal interview
    c. Phone interview
4. Design questionnaire in consultation with:
    a. Administrators

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[4]Harry K. Schwarzweller Research Design, Field Work Procedures, and Data Collection, Problems in a Follow-up Study of Young Men From Eastern Kentucky. (Lexington: Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Kentucky, 1963).

b. Teachers

c. Citizens advisory committee

d. Student committee

e. Board of education

5. Obtain authorization for use of signatures from teachers or administrators who will be signing alert cards, cover letters, and reminder cards/letters.

6. Obtain addresses of former students.

7. Prepare master address file.

Phase II

Data Collection

1. First mailing - alert cards.

2. End of first week - second mailing - cover letters and questionnaires.

3. First response analysis:

   a. Begin running count of returned, completed questionnaires

   b. Begin search for correct address (of instruments returned because of incorrect address)

   c. Compile address list for third mailing (non-respondents and corrected corrected address)

4. End of second week - third mailing

   a. Reminder cards for non-respondents

   b. Questionnaires to corrected addresses (of instruments returned because of incorrect address)

   c. Continue search for corrected address

   d. Prepare list for fourth mailing

5. End of third week - fourth mailing

   a. Reminder letter and second copy of questionnaire to non-respondents.

   b. Continue response analysis

6. End of fourth week - fifth and final mailing - Reminder card with cut-off date to non-respondents.

Phase III

Analysis of Data

1. Preparation of Follow-up report
    a. Analysis of findings
    b. Non-respondent report
2. Conferences with:
    a. Administrators
    b. Teachers
    c. Citizens
    e. Student committee
    e. Board of education
3. Publication of Follow-up Report

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we want to emphasize that former student follow-up studies constitute one of our most valuable techniques for assessing education system outcomes. We must remember that the results of a follow-up study should be combined with other findings to reach sound recommendations. Follow-up studies can produce valid and reliable findings useful in making sound educational decisions at the local, area, state, and national levels.

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